



No Child Left Behind What happens to schools that don't meet federal benchmarks?

At the heart of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is an assessment and accountability system designed to identify and assist schools and districts which do not meet standards for student performance.

In 2003, Tennessee made its accountability system more compatible with the federal NCLB requirements. Under this system, schools must show each year that a greater percentage of students are reaching standards of academic proficiency in math, reading and language arts. The goal of NCLB is for all children in every school and district to reach academic proficiency in those subjects by 2014.

Schools and districts which fall short of federal benchmarks for academic proficiency for more than one year in a row in the same content area will be identified as "high priority." The State Department of Education will identify and assist high priority schools and districts in an effort to guarantee that every child receives the best possible education. Below is a schedule of assistance for a school or district:

YEAR 1: "TARGET SCHOOLS" The first year a school does not meet federal standards, it is given a warning, and the State Department of Education offers technical assistance. There are no sanctions at this time, and the school has another year to demonstrate progress in the low-performing areas.

YEAR 2: "SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT 1" If a school does not meet federal benchmarks for a second consecutive year, it is put in "school improvement," which triggers a number of initiatives aimed at raising school performance. At this stage, parents of students in Title I schools -- schools that receive federal funds -- are offered school choice.

YEAR 3: "SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT 2" After three years, the state works with the school district and school staff to develop an intensive improvement plan to channel additional resources toward improving student performance. Children in Title I schools are offered supplemental educational services, such as tutoring, at no cost.

YEAR 4: "CORRECTIVE ACTION" If after four years the school has still not improved, it is put on probation. At this stage, the State Department of Education may take action such as removing school staff, increasing the length of the school day or year, or decreasing the authority of local management.

YEAR 5: "RESTRUCTURING 1" The school district will prepare a plan for restructuring the school or district with options including conversion to a charter school, replacing existing staff, taking over management or contracting with a university to take over management.

YEAR 6: "RESTRUCTURING 2 (ALTERNATIVE GOVERNANCE)." At this stage, the State Department of Education will implement the plan devised when the school entered Restructuring 1.